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'When I Look I am Seen, So I Exist to Change': Supplementing Honneth's Recognition Model for Social Work

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‘When I Look I Am Seen, So I Exist to Change’: Supplementing Honneth’s Recognition Model for Social Work

1 Abstract

The subject of identity continues to attract widespread interest and debate in the social sciences. The nature of who we are, our potential to be different, and our similarity with others, underpins many present-day social issues. This paper contributes to this debate by examining critically the work of Axel Honneth on optimal identity-formation. Although broadly supporting Honneth’s chief construct of inter-personal recognition, a gap in his thinking is highlighted and addressed through proffering a fourth dimension to his tripartite model. This additional dimension requires demonstrations of recognition that instil hope in the face of hardship and empower positive transformations in identity. The implications of this reworked model for social work are then considered in terms of a range of approaches that can be utilised to build flourishing identities characterised by self-esteem, self-confidence, self-respect and self-belief.

2 Key Words: identity, recognition, change, social work intervention

3 Introduction

The interconnection between identity-formation and the attainment of well-being is receiving increasing attention by the social work academy (Thomas & Holland, 2010; McMurray et al, 2011; Hingley-Jones, 2012). This focus is to be welcomed as the construct of identity has sometimes been addressed by social workers in a perfunctory way (McMurray et al, 2011). Yet, it is axiomatic that identity conditions our perceptions of self, others and the social world in an irrepressible and foundational manner. Desired attributes, such as self-respect, self-confidence, self-efficacy and self-esteem, are

predicated on a flourishing identity, reflecting inner congruence. This article contributes to this theme by reviewing critically the work of Axel Honneth on the importance of acts of *recognition* in self-realisation (2005). Importantly, it builds on the author's earlier attempts to utilise Honneth's thinking to develop social work practice. Thus, I have previously applied his tri-partite model to the conceptualisation and implementation of family support (); the social pathology of individualism within western societies and how it manifested in the theme of personalisation in social welfare (); and the disabling emotion of shame following acts of misrecognition and how critical social work might respond to build pride in service users ().

In this theoretical work, I have accepted Honneth's three conceptual categories of 'love', 'rights' and 'esteem' at face value, viewing them as sufficient precursors for optimal identity-formation and conflict transformation. However, this article marks a departure from this earlier corpus of work by critically questioning the adequacy of these premises. Specifically, I argue that a fourth dimension of recognition, not addressed by Honneth, needs to supplement his model to make it more fully apposite for understanding the psychology and politics of optimal identity-formation. Consequently, this theory-building move goes beyond the expository focus of the previous body of work by applying critique in order to re-work Honneth's social psychology.

Following this theory-building step, the implications for social work practice are set out addressing how the enhanced model overturns processes of instrumentalism in contemporary social life and social work which reify the service user, misrecognising her

unique identity. In making this move, I argue social (in)justice is fundamentally played out through social interaction whether in the intimate domain of the ‘face-to-face’ or in institutional arenas. Social work, it is contended, needs to reinvigorate both the ‘psychology of identity-formation’ and also the ‘politics of recognition’, and retain them as master concepts underpinning the social work process of assessment, goal-setting, intervention and evaluation.

4 Honneth’s Theory of Identity

The theorisation of human identity continues to attract widespread interest in the social sciences with contributions on the subject emanating from, *inter alia*, cultural studies (Hall, 2003), sociology, (Elias, 2000), social psychology (Tuffin, 2005) and psychoanalytical theory (Benjamin, 1988; Winnicott, 1999). Within these diverse theoretical outpourings, it is possible to identify a number of themes including the idea that identity is ‘sutured’ within language and discourse (Foucault, 1980; Lacan, 2005); or that it emerges from early object-relations with significant others (Klein, 1997); or unfolds within the context of concrete, socio-historical circumstances (Bourdieu, 2003).

Within this corpus of work there is a compendium of sociological (Rorty, 1980; Taylor, 1994; Fraser, 1995; Honneth, 2005) and social work literature (Froggett, 2004; Webb, 2010; Turney, 2012) acknowledging the link between identity-formation and inter-subjective *recognition*. These texts support the contention that the self is a social product born out of day-to-day social interaction. Importantly, they suggest we are first and foremost social beings seeking human intimacy and closeness. Heidegger captured this

notion so ineluctably in his *magnum opus*, *Being and Time* (2005), saying we exist to ourselves in the sense of already *being* in a social world that is shared with others. His stance presented a powerful challenge to the Cartesian philosophy of consciousness (Descartes, 1990) which viewed identity-formation as an intra-psychic process enacted by a self-sustaining, unitary subject. While Cartesians promoted a dualistic model separating the ‘self’ from the social and material world, recognition theorists, in the spirit of Heidegger, emphasised the primacy of inter-subjective relations in forming the ‘social self’.

In this section, I outline and critically appraise the work of Axel Honneth (2005; 2010), a leading proponent of the ‘recognition theoretic’, and contributor to new left thinking. For Honneth, ‘recognition’ of the ‘other’ is the axial principle around which the ‘politics of identity’ and social justice turns. Moreover, he contends it has become the *leitmotif* of our time and one that constitutes the inestimable, overarching, moral category guiding theory-building and praxis in social justice.

These are bold, inexorable claims that deserve to be taken seriously because they centre on privately held and publicly identified injustices. Honneth’s concern, here, was the alleviation of everyday misery in the form of humiliation, disrespect, social deprivation, unemployment, social isolation, poverty, the obsolescence of rural communities and social exclusion. In all these types of suffering a normative principle had been violated; that is, there had been a misrecognition of the human subject’s feelings at a primal, anthropological level.

Honneth addressed these themes by synthesising Hegel's (1979) ideas on the nature of the social self, and Mead's (1967) postulations on social development, to construct a systematic, social theory of recognition. He was animated by Hegel's argument that one's relationship to oneself was not a solitary experience held in the private theatre of the mind but rather a matter of reciprocity. Mead's theorisation of *perspective-taking* complemented this axiom. This was the process whereby social actors imagined, through an inner conversation, how others might be reacting to them. In doing so, perspective-taking internalised social norms and shaped social behaviour. Mead also postulated how social change was possible by referring to the component of the self known as the 'I': the creative, virtuosic force of human agency that dialogued with the social 'me' (that is, society internalised in the person – its rules and prohibitions) to arrive at decisions and initiate change.

To reiterate, Honneth's intention was to build on the philosophical and observational hypotheses coming out of Hegel and Mead's work, to search for empirical and historical support for the cardinal idea that human identity was irrefutably intertwined with everyday recognition. Moreover, he argued that struggles for recognition were the impetus for social change and social justice particularly when experiences of disrespect could be located in a common, emancipatory discourse. So, unlike Hobbes (1973) and Machiavelli (1961), who propounded the atomistic view that social change emanated from narcissistic self-preservation, Honneth argued that claims for rightful identity were the driving force behind societal transformations.

With these philosophical premises in place, Honneth constructed the centrepiece of his emancipatory project. It suggested that three ‘spheres of recognition’ were required to lay the foundation for a positive ‘relation-to-self’, namely: (a) receiving love, care and positive regard (b) having one’s rights respected in the widest sense possible and (c) appreciating and valuing a person’s skills and contribution to the community. Disrespect, according to Honneth, was synonymous with the denial of one or more of these three spheres of interactional validation. Moreover, misrecognition provided the justificatory impetus for struggle, contest and social change. What made conflict a moral enterprise, opined Honneth, were the feelings of outrage – shame, humiliation, hurt - emanating from episodes of misrecognition. In this way the moral grammar of outrage confirmed the normative ideal of a just society. Table 1 sets out Honneth’s ideas in diagrammatic form.

Table 1 – Honneth’s three forms of recognition

<i>Forms of recognition</i>	<i>Primary relationships of love</i>	<i>Legal relations involving rights</i>	<i>Community relations that value strengths and build solidarity</i>
<i>Dimension of personality</i>	Needs and emotions	Moral standing	Worth
<i>Mode of recognition</i>	Emotional care	Showing respect	Appreciating a person’s strengths and contribution to the community
<i>Developmental potential</i>	Security and resilience	Empowerment	Competence
<i>Practical relation-to-self</i>	Self-confidence	Self-respect	Self-esteem
<i>Forms of disrespect</i>	Abuse	Denial of rights and exclusion	Denigration and insult
<i>Threatened component of self</i>	Physical and emotional integrity	Social Integrity	Dignity

Let us examine each of these three forms of recognition in greater depth.

(1) Primary relationships of love and positive regard

According to Honneth, the first dimension of recognition was rooted in early human development but continued throughout the life cycle. When a young infant's primary emotional needs for a secure base were met, she developed a relaxed, confident identity. From this base, she could explore her world, master various skills and return to this protective haven when an emotional threat arose.

Honneth turned to the British, object-relations theorist, David Winnicott (1999) to gain theoretical support for his thesis. In particular, he adopted Winnicott's contention that the developing infant was subject to two primary impulses: to individuate, on the one hand, and to forge a symbiotic union with the mother, on the other. The key challenge for the infant, according to Winnicott, was to successfully emerge from the symbiosis with her mother in order to become an independent, confident self – but a self that had nevertheless retained a deep sense of its indelible union with her. Basic self-confidence emerged if these developmental challenges were successfully met. By way of contrast, unloving responses (for example, acts of child abuse) could threaten the infant's physical and emotional integrity. One's sense of self-confidence, or lack of it, might continue into adulthood affecting the quality of trust forged with others.

(2) Legal relations involving rights

For Honneth, the human subject must receive respect from others in addition to acts of love and care. Recognition through respect denoted the bestowal of human rights. This

was to view the person as an end *sui generis* and not a means to an end, to paraphrase Kant's famous categorical dictum (1964). Possessing rights, we feel a sense of equality, empowerment and citizenship.

From an historical perspective, Honneth suggested rights, in traditional societies, were based on labour relations and positions within occupational hierarchies; in post-traditional societies, however, they had become universalized and derived from the recipients' rational assent. Over time, rights had come to reflect Marshall's (1950) classic typology endowing citizens with civil, political and social welfare entitlements but only as a result of struggle and contestation when rights had been denied and integrity threatened. Honneth was keen to interpret the typology in the widest possible sense so that the citizen was entitled to live a life free from the effects of misogyny, sectarianism, racial prejudice and material inequities. By embracing this latter dimension, he was stressing the importance of re-distributive policies in politics. Moreover, *contra* Nozick (1974) and *pro*-Rawls (2003), this was re-distribution by political decree as opposed to the individual's consent.

(3) Community of value and solidarity

The third and final form of recognition took a communitarian turn (Putnam, 2000). Here, Honneth adopted Hegel and Mead's view that identity-formation – and the feeling of being unique within the social group - arose from a community recognising a person's attributes, strengths and traits. In adopting this stance, Honneth was basically saying self-esteem arose when actors achieved culturally defined goals and subsequently had their

accomplishments recognised. Such goals differed according to time and place. For example, pre-modern, hierarchical societies favoured honour as an attribute whereas post-traditional societies prized individual prestige or standing. Moreover, in the latter context, cultural interpretations of achievement and esteemed attributes were open to dissension.

A central plank of Honneth's argument, here, was that social groups or social movements attempted, 'by means of symbolic force and with reference to general goals, to raise the value of the abilities associated with their way of life' (p. 127). Defining what was to be esteemed or otherwise, from a cultural perspective, was the piston in the engine propelling the 'politics of difference' in modern social life. Yet, in all of this, Honneth saw the possibility of value –consensus, of solidarity amongst social groups as to what counted as a laudable characteristic or contribution to the community. Solidarity arose as part of a 'felt concern' for the other's value. However, the converse – where insult and denigration featured– led to an impairment of the self, to a feeling one's dignity had been transgressed.

5 Reviewing Honneth's Contribution

By way of comment, what is appealing about Honneth's programme is its philosophical and political comprehensiveness and inclusivity. That is, there is a firm communitarian strand (in the idea personal attributes are socially affirmed); there is a libertarian strand (in the appeal to a wide body of inviolable, Rawlsian-type rights); there is a neo-Kantian strand (in the sensitivity to abstract moral agency); and there is a psycho-social strand (enacted through the lens of intimate object-relations). In other words, Honneth

approached the subject of recognition by synthesising a range of perspectives – sociological, psychological and philosophical. This integration is convincing in that empirical and historical evidence is presented for his claims. Moreover, by embracing the domains of the ‘self’, inter-subjectivity and culture, he took account of the delicate interplay between ‘human agency’ and wider social forces – a theme which has exercised the minds of many sociological inquirers (Archer, 1996; Bourdieu, 2003; Douglas, 2003).

In all of this Honneth re-energises critical social theory and moral philosophy while breaking with the turn to critical linguistics popularised by Habermas (1986), his long time mentor. According to Honneth, social justice stems not just from egalitarian procedures of communication, as in Habermas’ ‘discourse ethics’; rather, it is sourced by the fecund nature of inter-subjectivity, its immanent possibilities for moral feelings and appreciation of the ‘other’. Norms are not merely the outcome of unrestricted communication; they occur in the context of respected feelings, identities and cultural patterns. The corollary to this is that norms are breached through acts of misrecognition and disrespect.

There are some acute differences of emphasis, though, between Honneth’s approach and that of other leading ‘identity-recognition’ theorists. Taylor (1994), although sharing a common base with Honneth in viewing recognition as a master construct, neglects, for the most part, class and distributive justice. His focus is mainly on the politics of multi-cultural identity embracing equality and difference as conjoint themes. As a consequence,

Taylor gives insufficient attention to the real and substantive effects of economic inequalities, and how they impact on recognition struggles.

Adopting a different cultural lens, Franz Fanon had located recognition struggles within a neo-colonial context rather than the Eurocentric paradigm undergirding Honneth's empirical and theoretical work. In his pioneering study, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1965), Fanon investigated the recognition struggles of 'colonised' peoples as they attempted to reclaim their unique identities through de-colonizing counter-narratives against the backdrop of white, hegemonic, universalist and univocal conceptions of culture and civilization. There was a moral imperative, here, to recognize the dignity of all, irrespective of their racial or cultural affiliations. Putting this another way, the moral consideration of the 'other' became, for Fanon, the quintessential hub around which decolonisation processes turned.

What made Fanon's approach distinctive, was his unique application of an Africanized, phenomenological understanding of the psycho-dynamics of race-bound misrecognition and its impact on the 'self'. This was not only an analysis of the inner experience of imposed racial identities on subaltern, black populations, but also of how the self might reclaim esteem and cultural pride. This phenomenological understanding of misrecognition, through language and cultural conditioning, was discernibly different to Honneth's revivification of the Frankfurt School's appropriation of critical social theory to counter perceived social pathologies in modern western societies. More specifically, Fanon's starting point was misrecognition in grounded, concrete cultural experience as

opposed to conceptualising it, first and foremost, from an essentially anthropocentric, Hegelian, philosophical position.

Clearly Taylor and Fanon made different uses of the recognition-theoretic compared to Honneth. However, a most prominent conceptual tussle has been played out in the debate between Fraser and Honneth (1995). For the former, a *bivalent* theory was required to explain injustice in the domains of culture and economy rather than applying a comprehensive, monistic theory of recognition to both, as Honneth had done. In reality, though, Fraser conceded that most forms of social subordination involved both kinds of oppression and were practically intertwined. Tellingly, Fraser insisted that the redistribution of material and economic resources throughout society could not be reduced merely to struggles over cultural recognition. As such, it was claimed that Honneth's recognition theory was deficient when it came to causal explanations of economic inequality and, following this, was therefore not able to adroitly guide emancipatory praxis.

Honneth's rejoinder to these charges, argued that the dynamics of capitalist markets, and the economic injustices to which they led, arose from deeply institutionalised and embedded relations of recognition. A superimposing recognition order(s) would consequently have a formative influence on society's economic distribution. There is some evidence for this counter-claim. Hence, cultural ascriptions shaping attitudes to gender, ethnicity, familial roles, life-course ambitions, and occupational tasks (such as house and care work) can have a formative impact on reproducing the division of labour,

levels of financial reward and inequalities. In this context, the normative consensus that accepts remuneration for work outside the home, yet blithely endorses the ‘second shift’ of unpaid domestic work within the home, is a misrecognition anomaly.

Moreover, changes in the superstructure’s normative, cultural and legal orders around the membership of unions, the power they held, the attenuation of their legal rights, prohibitions on strike action, and the deregulation of employer responsibilities, led blue collar workers to experience an ambient fear of expendability in the face of economic hardship. In a different vein, cultural stereotypes (propagated invidiously through a range of media outlets) of sections of the working class in Britain, portraying them as ‘benefits scroungers’, ‘chavs’ and ‘cheats’, have led to populist demands to curb welfare allowances.

That said, it is surely asinine to argue that recognitional practices *fully determine* all economic outcomes in each and every instance. Given the ‘revolving door’ between economic and political elites, operating at the highest levels of the neo-liberal state (Klein, 2007), and their involvement in globalised flows of capital and multi-national corporations, there are macro-economic processes beyond the cultural sphere that determine distributional wealth. Unemployment may not be due solely to a recognition order gone awry, but linked as well with world-wide macro events involving labour saving technologies, fluctuating interest rates, banking scandals and so on. Taking all of this into account, we can conclude from the Fraser-Honneth debate that, while the former downplays the significance of recognition for economic distribution, the latter at times

overestimates its potential as a capacious construct explaining all forms of injustice, particularly ones linked to economic outcomes.

In the social work literature, Garrett (2010) and Webb (2010) were less convinced about the relevance of Honneth's recognition theory for social work, and more supportive of Fraser, although Webb saw some merit in the way it connected socio-cultural and socio-economic aspects of injustice. For Garrett, though, Honneth's theory led to a psychologisation of human problems and, in its wake, a blame culture that stigmatised the oppressed. More significantly, it failed to acknowledge the role of the neo-liberal state in promulgating social and economic cleavages (a charge also levied at Fraser). As such, the state was curiously a 'lost object of critical analysis, critique and comment' (p. 1527). This was despite the fact that it played a central role in fomenting inequality and directly structuring differences between individuals and social groups. Garrett's point was prescient. Furthermore, even though Honneth did consider the role of the state in his most recent work on the nature of freedom in society (2014), it was cast in positive terms as the social foundation of democratic life. Evidently, the state was a work-in-progress; an institution, along with the family and civil society, that enabled citizens to find their social freedoms through shared projects. The scourge of the neo-liberal state was not something that explicitly registered perhaps because Honneth embraced an Hegelian view of it as a guarantor of freedom.

In contrast to these critical responses, a number of social work theorists have commented positively on the significance of Honneth's work for social work. Froggett (2004), for

instance, charts how the use of artistic mediums in social work - such as story-telling, poetry and drama - can build a rich symbolic life within service users and contribute to their overall wellbeing. She links this creative process with Honneth's tripartite model of identity-formation arguing that art connects people, enabling an essential validation of their creative faculties and a sense of social appreciation. Importantly, for this theorist, social work as a form of art and recognition, counters the turn to technocracy which bedevils social work in many quarters. In a run-away run which privileges scientism in social life, to the detriment of the arts and humanities, Froggett's arguments have much purchase.

Turney (2012), in a different vein, finds Honneth's emphasis on the alliteration of 'recognition', 'respect' and 'reciprocity', as integral to relationship-based social work practice. More specifically, she makes the case that recognition theory provides an ethical platform for working with involuntary service users, particularly in situations where children are at risk of harm. Turney's argument has credence as parents value social work responses which show care, acknowledge rights and evince strengths (Turnell & Essex, 2006). An involuntary response may well be a reaction to a threatened identity: one that has most likely experienced various types of disrespect and misrecognition in the past.

In a complementary move, Jull (2009) embraces Honneth's recognition theory as a normative ideal for analysing institutional practices in social work. The notion of recognition, here, stands as a counterbalance to embedded, pernicious forms of *judgement* which lead to labelling and stigma. Judgement, it is argued, can be a form of disrespect

or misrecognition which has ramifications for the self because it can often be infused with hegemonic, power-saturated discourses. The impact of the new public management, neoliberal individualism and an administrative take on social welfare, combine into a toxic brew militating against the recognition ideal. Institutions must be founded, it is argued, on respect and social appreciation in order to foster empowerment, independence and participation (Thomas, 2012).

These positive applications aside, one should not conclude, however, that Honneth's monistic theory of recognition is conceptually complete. His tripartite distinction between the different forms of recognition is perhaps deficient in one crucial aspect: it neglects the subject's capacity to change herself and her perception of the world when this important attribute is recognised. The nature of existence is to face hardship and suffering. Yet, through others, we gain hope and encouragement (as two related forms of recognition) to construct personal meaning in the most adverse conditions (Frankl, 2004). Honneth's neglect of this existential capacity is somewhat ironic in that he accedes to Mead's view regarding the creative part of the personality known as the 'I'. To repeat: to *recognise* another's potential to change or transform his outlook (on self and others) against the backdrop of immense adversity, is a fundamental part of existence. So, I have added a fourth dimension to Honneth's model embracing this additional form of recognition (see Table 2 below):

Table 2 – A Fourth Dimension of Recognition: Facilitative Relations of Change

<i>Forms of recognition</i>	<i>Primary relations of love</i>	<i>Legal relations involving rights</i>	<i>Community relations that value strengths and build solidarity</i>	<i>Facilitative relations encouraging personal change</i>
<i>Dimensions of personality</i>	Needs and emotions	Moral standing	Worth	Cognition and emotion
<i>Mode of recognition</i>	Demonstrating emotional care	Showing respect	Appreciating a person's strengths and contribution to a community	Instilling hope and belief in one's capacity to change oneself
<i>Developmental potential</i>	Security and resilience	Empowerment	Competence	Optimism and internal locus of control
<i>Practical relation-to-self</i>	Self-confidence	Self-respect	Self-esteem	Self-belief and self-efficacy
<i>Forms of disrespect</i>	Abuse	Denial of rights	Denigration and insult	Reinforcing learned helplessness
<i>Threatened component of self</i>	Physical and emotional integrity	Social Integrity	Dignity	Human agency

To recognize another's capacity for change and transformation is to recognize the 'self' is in a constant state of flow, that it is multiplex, context-dependent and discontinuous. The identity of the 'I' now is different from the 'I' of a moment ago in the sense that the current 'I' has subsumed a moment's more relational experience (Bergson, 1912).

Recognizing the self as a work-in-progress with transformative potential, rather than a static object, has much intellectual support. Developmental psychologists (Blasi, 1988; Deci & Ryan, 1991) have stressed the 'self's' capacity for assimilation and adaptation to the social environment as have contemporary neuroscientists (Baggini, 2011). Critical

readings of Giddens (2004), Beck (2004) and Castells (2000) show their attempts to sketch a theory of the modern, reflexive self – a self that is fluid or liquid (Bauman, 2000) and able to re-construct itself without the shackles of religion and tradition; a self that is no longer painting by numbers, as it were, but master of its own portrait.

We also see a challenge to the traditional view of the self as a fixed entity in the work of a number of post-structuralists (Lyotard, 1979; Foucault, 1984; Lacan, 2005). In this genre, the ‘self’ is transparent, in a state of flux, discontinuous and decentred. With no universal or timeless truths in postmodern landscapes, everything is relative, indeterminate and open to contention including the defining boundaries of identity itself. This latter theme is taken up by narrative therapists (for example, White & Epston, 1990). They argue the non-essentialised self can transcend the destabilizing hold of negative or ‘thin’ narratives through discovering the richer (or ‘thick’) narratives that emerge from varying descriptions of experience. Prosaically put, personal freedom is synonymous with what we do with what has been done to us. The self has the capacity to move beyond its own limiting, internal censorship.

This insight resonates with Sartre’s proclamation that ‘the defining feature of the imagination lies in the ability of the human mind to imagine what is not the case’ (Thody & Read, 1990, p. 29). This is an act of expanded cognition aimed at enhancing competence and self-efficacy. However, this requires both a narrator and facilitator of personalised meaning. What is being addressed here, is the human subject’s capacity, through discursive relations with others, to alter course in existential terms, to change

disabling narratives that have arisen from episodes of denigration. It is not that we ‘have’ a self with essentialist, fixed qualities; instead, we ‘do’ a self in the sense the self is a social accomplishment. People can deploy, negotiate and achieve new descriptions of themselves and resist essentialist category descriptions imposed on them by others. Essentially, though, they achieve this capacity through social interaction where recognition of this capacity is to the fore. When nurtured, this capacity can lead to an internal ‘locus of control’; that is, the perception the self is in control of its destiny.

The achievement of a fuller realisation of the possibilities inherent within the ‘self’ is the intended outcome of this form of recognition and is fundamental to the helping task (Parton & O’Byrne, 2000). The nature of existential therapy pivots on this fundamental premise. For instance, *Daseinanalysis* (Cooper, 2003) assists the individual to examine the full terrain of her world including those areas that had previously been occluded. In denying the subject the right to explore this terrain – perhaps through enforced passivity – we are denying the creative aspects in human personality.

These additional ideas concerning the ‘self’ and its need for recognition in this particular context, are not inimical to Honneth’s programme but rather augment it in the sense they are rooted in Mead’s theorisation of identity. Here is what Ritzer (2000) says concerning Mead’s formulation of the ‘I’ which was referred to earlier:

‘The ‘I’ gives Mead’s theoretical system some much-needed dynamism and creativity.

Without it, Mead’s actors would be totally dominated by external and inner controls. With it, Mead is able to deal with the changes brought about not only by the great figures in

history (for example, Einstein) but also by individuals on a day-to-day basis. It is the 'I' that makes these changes possible...' (p. 345)

'the 'I' constitutes something that we all seek – the *realisation* of the self. It is the 'I' that permits us to develop a 'definite personality'. (p. 345) (My emphasis).

Yet, a critical question might be raised at this point: is not this added form of recognition just another aspect of recognition through love: in which case why create it as a separate category? In response to this question, my contention is that acts of love are primarily directed to the expression of intense feelings of warmth. Similarly, friendship cements the bond of mutual affection. This is how Honneth shapes his first column particularly when he refers, at length, to the intense bond of affection between the mother and her child at the early stage of dependence. Such states of being are not concentrated fundamentally on the change process which may involve challenge or respectful confrontation, potentiating the listener to reflect on her circumstances. Moreover, the sense of self-confidence that ideally emerges from the experience of 'recognition as love' is not necessarily synonymous with the attainment of self-belief that emanates from 'recognition as facilitating change'. I can have self-confidence with regards to a presenting challenge but remain blasé as to whether I will succeed or not in achieving a particular set of outcomes. Self-belief differs from this in the sense that I not only willingly engage in the activity but am sure I can carry it off to meet the outcomes I desire.

6 Implications for Social Work

Table 2 can be used as a counterfactual tool in social work practice. This is because it sets out the requirements for ideal, optimal identity-formation regardless of temporal or spatial contexts. It is therefore universalistic in its scope. The purpose of a counterfactual tool is to set out the ‘ideal’ and measure reality against it in order to highlight deficiencies or to show where requirements have been met or partially realised. It can also be used to imagine what might have occurred, from a retrospective stance – as a matter of reflective learning. Some important observations arise when the tool is applied to social work.

First, it invites the question as to whether social work is attending to identity-formation as a founding principle of practice? This question rhetorically foregrounds identity as a master concept in social work – one at the heart of the social work encounter. This is a vital presupposition because modern social work has become imbued with what Habermas (1986) referred to as the voice of the ‘system’: the role of the State in shaping social welfare services utilising a technocratic *modus operandi*. The ‘system’s’ imperatives result in a raft of policy and procedure, corporate models of regulation and social care governance, tick-box forms of assessment, the categorisation of human behaviours through the ubiquitous pro-forma and in social work’s electronic turn (Garrett, 2005). Identity seems to be occluded in all of this and not even on the social radar in many sites where street-level, turbo-bureaucracy is in the ascendancy and a new public sector business model colonises many organisational cultures (Froggett, 2004). The routinisation of practice in this ‘brave new world’ has emasculated professional discretion (Munro, 2011).

Moreover, there is an increasing turn in risk assessment towards actuarial models listing objective risk factors for consideration as opposed to appraising the meaning of risk, phenomenologically speaking, for the service users under scrutiny; in other words, what risk means for them in terms of how they view themselves, others and their social worlds. Such processes of objectification and reification are compounded by the McDonaldisation of social welfare (Ritzer, 2010), the propensity for developing tools of surveillance of marginalised populations, the rise of the preventive-regulative social State (Parton, 2006), and the increasing trend towards commodification in neo-liberal nations. In this miasma, the ‘psycho-social’ sphere has been eclipsed by an instrumental mind-set.

In adult services, the latest ‘hot’ policy of personalisation (Gardiner, 2011) does not necessarily refer to the personalisation of human narrative but rather devolving the purchase of services to the service user, beneficial as this may be. What is more, case management is sometimes reduced to the eligibility determination for cash assistance, rather than an understanding of the self *in situ*. Even for children in State care, where broken psycho-biographies are to the fore, the lack of serious attention to the theorisation of identity-formation in research, policy and practice is telling (McMurray et al, 2011). Identity might be glibly referred to but not always comprehensively understood nor addressed therapeutically. In this sense, the tool presents a challenge for those individuals who occupy leadership roles in developing human welfare services. Services need to be reviewed in the context of the provision of inter-subjective relationships to those in need. This is to reinstate the social model in social work, to see relationship-based practice as

axiomatic (Turney, 2010) and to ‘increase the life chances and opportunities of people...by building on their strengths, expertise and experience to maximise their capacities (Gray and Webb, 2012, p. 3).

Second, even when identity is overtly considered in social work practice, we might use the tool to examine exactly how this area is approached. The three dimensions of love, rights and strengths Honneth elucidated, and the fourth recognising the capacity for change (which the author added), are all areas that need to be assessed as they are integral to optimal identity-formation. To focus on only one area is to miss the holistic nature of identity. In social work assessment, information should be widely gathered, facts and feelings surmised and analysed, and a formulation reached on areas such as need, risk and the resources required. I suggest the tool might be used in this process to highlight what aspects of identity formation have been missed or misappraised in the assessment. Who, for example, are the significant others providing a child with love and care, respecting his rights, acknowledging his strengths and developing an inner locus of control? Such questions are vital in the assessment of parenting capacity which should not be reduced to acts of physical care nor just the provision of material resources to support the child’s development. In addition, they are helpful in determining whether thresholds of significant harm have been met in potential serious cases of child abuse. In this context, emotional abuse continues to be viewed as a ‘slippery’ domain in the courts and elsewhere; maybe this is because, in part, social workers are not confident in their theoretical understanding of identity, its component parts and the impact of sustained disrespect on the child’s sense of self. Relating this contention to the tool, Honneth does

attribute much of his thinking to object-relations theory and the nature of the evolving emotional world of the child and its imbrication with close inter-subjective relations. Hence, this is to reaffirm we must understand identity-formation as both an intra-psychic and inter-personal process. Object-relations theory identifies the underpinning mechanisms influencing personality development over the lifespan as well as defended reactions to social work interventions. It has great relevance, therefore, for working with ‘involuntary service users’. Staying with this example, it is also important to assess who in a child’s social ecology recognises her strengths, builds up her self-efficacy, and acknowledges her rights as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the child. Furthermore, it is to ascertain the gaps in the child’s social networks, those people who offer consistent recognition in one or more of the four dimensions, or alternatively, who misrecognise the child through acts of abuse, disrespect, criticism and the reinforcement of learned helplessness. It is to be sensitive to the feelings of shame and outrage which follow misrecognition by conveying accurate empathy.

Third, the four dimensions map across to different forms of social work intervention (see Table 3 below).

Table 3 – Recognition and Forms of Social Work Intervention

	<i>Primary Relations of Love</i>	<i>Legal Relations Involving Rights</i>	<i>Community Relations that Value Strengths Build Solidarity</i>	<i>Facilitative Relations Encouraging Personal Change</i>
<i>Forms of Social Work Intervention</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationship-based social work Social work as object-relations Social work as care and accurate empathy Social work as building pride 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti-oppressive social work Rights-based social work Critical social work Political social work Multi-cultural social work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengths-based social work Social work as mentoring talents, interests and skills Community social work Social Pedagogy 	Social work as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> forging a therapeutic alliance instilling hope and optimism enhancing self-efficacy social constructionist social work
<i>Outcomes for Service Users</i>	Builds self-confidence	Builds self-respect	Builds self-esteem	Builds self – belief

The contention here is that social work must be an amalgam of all these different approaches, applied at different times and places according to the use of professional discretion, if we are to ensure service users are helped to acquire an optimal identity. The table directs the social worker to outcomes that are not primarily about bureaucratic proficiency nor systemic achievements but rather framed according to the nature of the self, or in Honneth's terms, one's practical relation-to-self. It is how the service user feels about him/herself on a day-to-day basis which counts. This is about the inner conversations people have within themselves when faced with identities that are ascribed (rather self-construed), or where stereotypes and reactions based on essentialist notions tarnish the self leading often to stigma and shame. Through relationship-based social work, the aim is to enhance a person's confidence, help her build self-respect, esteem, pride and a sense of personal efficacy. Moreover, the table marries the 'psycho-social' with the 'cultural' and 'political'. The dimensions of 'care' and 'change' are concerned

with the person's intra-psychic world and close relationships whereas the dimension of 'respect' takes the social worker into the realm of human rights, multi-culturalism and capabilities. In Honneth's view, such rights are to be defined widely and include opportunities for material well-being as well as liberal rights to expression of one's views. Here, advocacy plays such a crucial role in ensuring equality of treatment and access to resources yet retaining respect for difference.

The dimension of 'strengths' directs the social worker to the ecological systems surrounding the service user such as schools, work places, community organisations and so on. These are the networks that can potentially recognise a person's unique contribution to social life and provide holistic, pedagogical opportunities for growth and development. In all of this creating a therapeutic alliance with the service user is of the utmost importance as is instilling hope and the expectation change is possible. These attributes of the helping process are at least as important as the chosen therapeutic model in realising effective outcomes. In a related vein, building self-efficacy comes through the application of cognitive-behavioural methods, positive reinforcement, mentoring, and providing opportunities for experimenting with new skills where opportunities exist for learning through observation. To summarise, Table 3 promotes a counter-factual comparison between actual practice and each of the dimensions of recognition and their corresponding social work interventions – noting to what extent social work takes seriously the 'psychology of identity-formation' and the 'politics of recognition'.

Practically, though, it may be very difficult to make a linear extrapolation of recognition theory to these different forms of social work practice. Social workers often need to adapt and transfer theoretical ideas between different settings, temporal periods, cultures and specialist domains of working. Pure theoretical models reflect generalised prescriptions that often need to be modified through the application of common sense, intuition, practice wisdom and artistry. The use of self and one's emotional awareness are also involved in transferring theory into action. Bearing in mind the afore-mentioned points, critical reflection is one significant way of connecting recognition theory with different forms of social work intervention, and complements the application of the counterfactual analysis previously described.

Critical reflection involves examining and debunking taken-granted views about people and the social world in order to enhance practice (Fook and Gardiner, 2010). One way of starting the process, is to consider a *critical incident* involving the perceived misrecognition of service users. This is an event that is significant or important in the sense that it has potentially impeded optimal identity-formation or denied human rights in some fundamental way. Through supervision, social workers can be encouraged to describe the incident in full, so that awareness of important and relevant aspects of the 'self' and 'situation' are covered. Table 2, outlined above, can be used here to reflect on what type of misrecognition occurred, its impact, who was involved, the setting and time period and what social work intervention, as detailed in Table 3, was applied to address it

Building on this initial step, the social worker is then helped to analyse the facts and feelings arising from the incident, any experiences of shame and challenge any underlying assumptions or decisions to adopt particular practice responses. Why were certain models of intervention used and not others? How were they structured? Did the social worker consider the structural constraints impacting on the service users and use Honneth's model to cast light on them?

Such analysis of the incident, and response to it, then leads to an evaluative stage of reflection that applies judgement, insight, and synthesis to the presenting issues. Were the social worker's goals of intervention essentially met or not met? Did the reflection throw light onto relevant issues, and wider contexts such as the structural constraints affecting human lives? What were the strengths, weaknesses and gaps in the practice response? To what extent were the four columns of recognition addressed? On the basis of this evaluation, social workers can finally reflect on their learning: how they can enhance recognition-led social work intervention. Part of this process of learning, is to reflect on the application of abstract recognition theory to practical, grounded ethical dilemmas and complex scenarios involving risk and complex need.

7 Conclusion

What is truly marvellous about the human subject is his or her capacity to change and adapt in the face of challenge and threat. This is an ineluctable aspect of our evolutionary ontology for, when we look into the eyes of the 'other, we see a reflection of ourselves. Put in another way, 'when I look I am seen, so I exist to change'. This truism is captured

in Cooley's 'looking glass mirror' analogy. Importantly, when the mirror reflects love, care and respect, this is likely to have very positive ramifications for the self and its developmental potential. However, social workers must ensure vulnerable service users do not see jagged shards of glass – broken images refracting shame, ignominy and stigma. Such negative images constitute what Honneth referred to as the 'abyss of failed sociality' which attenuates the self and its creative capacity. Building on this axiomatic postulate, I supplemented Honneth's tripartite model of optimal identity-formation by including a fourth dimension not previously identified: that of recognising a subject's capacity for self-transformation. This aspect of recognition is as vital for optimal identity-formation as receiving care, respect and the acknowledgement of one's strengths. Expanding this view of recognition re-emphasises the importance of the psycho-social realm in social work and poses a challenge to various facets of bureau-professionalism and instrumentalism in modern practice which objectify need. Furthermore, the re-worked model embraces the politics of recognition, where claims to equality and difference are to the fore and social justice is a fundamental feature of social work.

However, the widespread application of recognition in social work must extend to the social work profession as well. How can we expect practitioners to recognise service users if they are continuously misrecognised in organisational life? The four-fold model of recognition espoused in this paper must apply in formal and informal supervision, the manner in which social workers are treated in meetings, how their training needs are identified and met, and how induction and mentoring are carried out. Boldly put, social workers must be *recognised* through acts of care and respect. Moreover, managers and

policy makers should recognise their strengths and be wary about deficit-led cultures of blame. They should also nurture the profession's agency – its capacity to enact transformative practice. More than this, the profession must be recognised by wider society and its institutions. Hence, the concept of recognition captures something essential in human subjectivity whether the focus is on the recipients or providers of social work services.

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